also been done away with. Private Scheduled Airlines of India which operate only in the domestic sector at present, have been encouraged to extend their operations to airports in Sir Lanka.

Safety of Indian tourists in Nepal

1776. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a bus of tourists from India in Nepal was set ablaze;

(b) if so, whether there was any loss of human life;

(c) what steps Government are taking to ensure safety of Indian tourists going to Nepal; and

(d) the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No human lives were lost in the incident; the passengers were asked to get down from the bus, before the bus was set on fire.

(c) and (d) Whenever any issue relating to safety and security of Indian nationals residing in or visiting Nepal is brought to the notice of the Government, it is taken up with the concerned authorities of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, whose response in such cases is positive. In the instant case, the matter was taken up with the police authorities of Nepal, who have registered a case.

Pak charges against India

1777. DR. AKHILESH DAS:
SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the letters, lately addressed by Pakistan to the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, charging India with adopting 'coercive means', and urging them to bring press to bear on Government of India to start a composite Indo-Pak dialogue and to agree on a ceasefire on the Line of Control; and

(b) if so, Government's response to the Pak move with the UN?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) The Government has seen identical letters dated 19th August 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council to this effect. India's position has been consistent. Under the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration, both India and Pakistan are committed to addressing all issues bilaterally. Government has also maintained that the UN has no role in this regard.

China's stand on Sikkim

1778. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA:
SHRI RAMA SHANKER KAUSHIK:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that China has struck off Sikkim as an independent country by removing it from its official website, taking a key steps towards resolution of their lingering border dispute; and

(b) if so, the current status of the border talks between China and India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Following the understandings reached during Prime Minister's visit to China in June 2003, a process has been started by which Sikkim will cease to be an issue in India-China relations. It has been noticed that some objectionable references to Sikkim have been removed from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China.

(b) During the visit of Prime Minister to China in June, 2003, both India and China reiterated their readiness to seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution of the boundary question through consultations on an equal footing. It was agreed that pending an ultimate solution, the two countries would work together to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas and continue to implement the agreements signed for this purpose, including for the clarification of the Line of Actual